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# THE SEWANEE REVIEW

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## TRANSLATION: A METHOD FOR THE VITAL STUDY OF LITERATURE

### SECOND PAPER

#### III. A PRACTICAL THEORY

In our first paper we quoted for criticism as typical of a certain school, the impossible theory of translation brought forward by Dr. Trench half a century ago, in connection with his still serviceable essay, introductory to the study of Calderon. It was not, however, without amusement that we read in Mr. Edward Fitzgerald's complete works a passage quoted from a letter to Dr. Tr  nch: "I remember that you regretted having tried the asonante, and you now decide that prose is best for English translation."<sup>1</sup> Action and reaction! From the strictest sect to the loosest! Yet such is human nature, and we need not marvel at his antipodal change of heart. The reader has but to compare Shelley and Fitzgerald with Trench and MacCarthy in the *Magico Prodigioso*; Fitzgerald alone with MacCarthy and Trench in the *Vida es Sue  o*, to decide whether it is better we should deal with a poet as a poet, and be an English Pegasus unto his Spanish poetship; or prefer the r  le of the pack ass, transporting his exotic provisions and camp outfit, nay, and his corpse to boot, while leaving his spirit to soar in spaces Empyrean beyond our English ken! So hopelessly bad as we may seem to imply, the case verily is not. But a little hyper-

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<sup>1</sup> Dated 1880; the translations, 1856.

bole sometimes, picturesquely jocose, clears the atmosphere, as the damnatory psalms and the British commination service did for our near and dear forefathers of blessed memory. "I am persuaded," says Fitzgerald, "that to keep life in the Work (as drama must), the translator, however inferior to his original, must recast that original into his own likeness, more or less."<sup>2</sup> Surely he is right, and let us remark incidentally: it is not only Drama that needs to have life kept in it! Fitzgerald's *Omar* has won both its author and translator great fame; and the famous translation of Omar was done on the same principle as the adaptations of Calderon, only far more idiosyncratically applied. Since, we have had many closer renderings of the Persian astronomer-poet's stanzas, but I fancy we shall, to the last man and woman of us, still hold on to the skirts of Fitzgerald, for all the insinuations of the "Variorum," or the praiseworthy improvements of Mr. George Roe.<sup>3</sup> It may be "impudence" to "meddle in so free and easy a way with a great man's masterpieces."<sup>4</sup> but Fitzgerald did not fail, as he feared; for he actually "conciliated English or modern sympathy," and performed the miracle of making Calderon and Omar into English; and modern poets, for whom we shall thenceforth care to suffer with stoic delight the labors even of literal translators; word for worders, verse for versers, rhyme for rhymers, pun for punners, unto the verbal contortionists and prestidigitators in the nethermost pit of unidiomatic infamy!

Quite apart from the doctrine and practice of this King of Paraphrasts, and his follower afar off (Mr. Richard Le-Gallienne, Hâfiz in tow), even the greatest of translators, is as we have now stated several times, by moments at least, however unavowedly of his school. Let the student copy out side by side Shelley's, Anster's, Haven's,<sup>5</sup> Swanwick's, Martin's, Taylor's, Latham's and Bowring's renderings of the Songs of the Archangels with which opens the Prologue in Heaven

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<sup>2</sup> A letter to James Russell Lowell, 1878.

<sup>3</sup> *Rubaiyât* of Omar Khâyyâm, etc. A. C. McClurg & Co., 1906.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to R. C. Trench, 1865.

<sup>5</sup> Select Minor Poems, translated from the German of Goethe and Schiller, with notes. John S. Dwight, Boston.

to Goethe's *Faust*.<sup>6</sup> Which of them is Goethe's poem? Or for greater brevity let the reader take the untranslatable last eight lines of the Second Part of *Faust*, and compare the results of translations, and decide whether he will insist on an identical rhyme-system in lines so brief as to exclude wholly the element of paraphrase.

TRANSLATION OF A POEM FROM GOETHE

- (1) *Alles Vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichniss ;  
Was Unzulängliche  
Hier wird's Ereigniss ;  
Das unbeschreibliche  
Hier ist es gethan  
Dast Ewig Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan.*
- (2) All we see before us passing  
Sign and symbol is alone;  
Here, what thought can never reach to  
Is by semblances made known;  
What man's words may never alter,  
Done in act — in symbol shown.  
Love, whose perfect type is woman  
The divine and human blending,  
Love forever and forever,  
Draws us onward, still ascending.  
(Anster, '35)
- (3) All of mere transient date  
As symbol showeth;  
Here the inadequate  
To fulness groweth;  
Here the ineffable  
Wrought is in love;  
The ever-womanly  
Draws us above. (Swanwick, '49)
- (4) Each thing of mortal birth  
Is but a type;  
What was of feeble worth  
Here becomes ripe!  
What was a mystery

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<sup>6</sup> In mentioning archangels, "Mr." and "Miss" become otiose glories, that scream for discreet omission — and so the euphonic protest against Arnoldian urbanity has been heeded here.

Here meets the eye;  
 The everwomanly  
 Draws us on high. (E. A. Bowring, '53)

- (5) All in earth's fleeting state  
 As symbol is still meant;  
 Here the inadequate  
 Grows to fulfillment,  
 Here is wrought the inscrutable,  
 To silence that awes us;  
 Love, eternal, immutable,  
 On, ever on, draws us. (Martin, '65)

- (6) All things transitory  
 But as symbols are sent;  
 Earth's insufficiency  
 Here grows to event:  
 The Indescribable  
 Here it is done;  
 The woman-soul leadeth us  
 Upward and on! (Taylor, '70)

- (7) Mortal that perishes  
 Types the ideal,  
 All that fault cherishes  
 Thus becomes real.  
 Wrought superhumanly  
 Here it is gone —  
 The ever-womanly  
 Draweth us on. (F. H. Hedge<sup>1</sup>)

- (8) All things corruptible  
 Are but reflection;  
 Earth's insufficiency  
 Here finds perfection;  
 Here the ineffable  
 Wrought in with love;  
 The Eternal-Womanly  
 Draws us above. (Latham, '02)

- (9) All things that perish here  
 Shadow the ideal;  
 Vain longings we cherish here,  
 Lo, they wax real;  
 Behold superhumanly  
 Th' ineffable done!  
 The evermore womanly  
 Draweth upward and on. (W. N. G.)

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<sup>1</sup> In Crowell's edition of Swanwick's *Faust*.

In a previous paper published in THE SEWANEE REVIEW, entitled: "Some Odes and Didactic Verse of Goethe in English," the little lyric *Über allen Gipfeln* was adduced, and its best known translations criticized, all on the score of the exiguous metric limits and the difficult rhyme-system of the original, which preclude paraphrase and natural idiomatic translation. We venture to offer for the reader's proper humiliation—if he cherish the heresy of absolute metric fidelity, etc., eleven gay experiments of our domestic Muse, tossing in air the Bohemian glass of an impossible little lyric by the great Goethe at his best.

- (1) *Über allen Gipfeln*  
Ist Ruh,  
In allen Wipfeln  
Spürest du  
Kaum einen Hauch;  
Die Vöglein schweigen im Walde  
Warte nur — balde  
Ruhest du auch.
- (2) Above every height, lo,  
Is calm;  
In treetops light, low,  
Breatheth the balm  
Of dreamless sleep;  
Woodbirds are dumb: be still too;  
Soon thou shalt have thy fill too  
Of peace, calm, deep.
- (3) Above every summit  
Peace broods;  
What hush hath o'ercome it —  
The gloam of the woods,—  
Scarce a breath aloft;  
The wee birds be silent also;  
Soon peace shall befall so  
Thee, too, dream-soft.
- (4) O'er all summits what quiet  
For aye!  
No breath doth sigh at  
The topmost spray,—  
No murmur to hear;  
Hushed are the woodland thrushes:  
How deep the spirit's hush is,—  
Thy rest draweth near.

- (5) Peace hovers forever  
       O'er the height;  
 In treetops no waver  
       To-night,  
       No breath; Ah, me  
 The birds in the woods be silent;  
 Abide but a little while, and  
       Peace visiteth thee.
- (6) Over all high places —  
       Repose!  
 In leafy laces  
       Comes and goes  
       To the topmost spray,  
 No breath even; the woodbirds are dumb now,  
 Wait, soon to thee will come, now  
       Repose for aye.
- (7) Above all high places  
       Calm bides;  
 In leafy green spaces  
       Aloft, there glides  
       Scarce a breath of air;  
 The woodbirds are still.   Refrain thee;  
 Like calm shall gain thee  
       Soon aware.
- (8) O'er all heights that are highest  
       All's still;  
 In treetops no shyest  
       Waking thrill,  
       No breath as in dream;  
 Birds in the brake are dumb too:—  
 Ah, wait,— thou soon wilt come to  
       Thy rest supreme.
- (9) O'er the heights forever  
       Is rest;  
 Not a breath, not a quiver,  
       The tranquillest  
       In the treetops high;  
 No note of woodthrush or plover;—  
 Be quiet,— the day is over —  
       Thy rest draws nigh.
- (10) On every sheer height is  
       Deep peace;  
 The breath so light is  
       Nigh to cease,—

In the tree tops, see!  
Woodwarblers of song are bereaven;  
Soon peace cometh even  
To thee and me.

- (11) O'er the summits thou soarest,  
Still Peace;  
To the tops of the forest  
Wavers cease,  
Scarce a breath! The song  
Of the woodbirds is fled. Ah, whither?  
Like peace stealeth hither  
For thee, ere long.
- (12) O'er the heights hov'reth  
Deep rest;  
Not a quiver discov'reth  
Wind-caressed,  
In the treetops a breath;  
The woodbirds hush them; Ah, bide thee,  
Rest steals beside thee,  
And beckoneth!

But if it be still contended that a translated poem shall preserve the exact form of the original, number of lines, metrical system, rhyme-enlacing, kind of rhyme etc., etc., how shall this be in a piece like the one in question? Feminine rhymes are scarce in English, and likely to be forced and grotesque. Admittedly no such word as 'Gipfel' exists in English, 'Ruhe' is not exactly convertible with either rest, calm or peace. For 'gipfel,' 'summit,' 'high places,' 'sheer height,' the 'heights' are only equivalents. Of these again 'summit' has no available rhymes; and even 'places' is very difficult, requiring a verbal roundabout, unless 'green spaces' can be pressed into service to describe the massed leafage of the trees, what French so collectively and with poetic delicacy describes as to "*la ramée*." So our eleven efforts at rendering this difficult little poem are printed here, to make evident that rigid adherence to the form of the original is theoretically possible, provided always somewhere paraphrase be permitted; and what is far more serious, the employment of forced rhymes, and occasionally doubtful uses of words (as 'glides' in the seventh, or 'wavers' in the eleventh version), and broken constructions (as



in the third, fourth, tenth and twelfth) be allowed to pass muster, where the original is a fluid indivisible whole.

Now the most serious defect apparent alike in all these eleven translations may as well be frankly confessed, anticipating our readers' head-shake. Where the original is simple, inevitable, with all the air of an improvisation, the eleven versions are more or less stilted, difficult, self-conscious and devoid of singing lilt. But how can ease and naïveté of expression be obtained, and a foreign rhyme system be adhered to unaltered; while we are constrained to move, besides, within such narrow metrical limits as to allow of practically no inversion and no paraphrase, that is with grace and charm?

Clearly the theory of rigid adhesion to the form of the original, must allow for exceptions numerous and glaring in proportion to the lack of kinship between the languages in question, and the singular felicity and inimitable fragility of lyric rhyme, rhythm, verbal euphony and spell-power.

#### IV. A GREAT TRANSLATOR

But it may very well be argued that the writer's skill and gift is not such as to establish any argument, whatever his laudable assiduity may be. Let us then turn from his admittedly doubtful experiments above quoted, to the work beyond cavil of perhaps the supreme English translator: Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

It was indeed a great gift to our literature, that wondrous volume of *Dante and His Circle*, enabling us all to estimate the value of the poetry our most inspired forefathers loved, and endeavored to emulate, from Chaucer to Sidney and Spenser. Considerable as may have been at times the influence of old France, that of Italian poetry was unintermittent and greatly for good. Not blindly adoring would we seem, but deeply thankful. We are indeed enabled at times to criticize Rossetti's work, enjoying the advantage of comparison with other translations. Compare for instance Dante's Sonnet to Guido Covaclanti in Shelley's version, with Rossetti's. The last lines of the octave trouble both translators.

*Anzi vivendo sempre in un talento  
Di star insieme crescesse il desio."*

But we, observing old companionship,  
To be companions still should long thereby.

Surely Shelley wins the honors with

That even satiety should still enhance  
Between our hearts their strict community.

But most striking is Rossetti's rendering of the second line in the sestet:

And her the thirtieth on my roll,

marring, for English readers with unintelligible fidelity, the poem as such. Shelley paraphrases this obscure reference to a list of bygone beauties, "and my gentle love" erring, only in the person of the possessive pronoun 'my' for 'thy.' On the other hand,

*E quivi ragionar sempre d'amore,*

is certainly better rendered:

And not to talk of anything but love,

by Rossetti; than by Shelley in his pointless phrase "with passionate talk." Yet again the last line:

*Siccome io credo che sariamo noi,*

is more lyrically fluid in Shelley's:

As I believe that thou and I should be,

than in Rossetti's—

As we should be, I think, if this were thus.

How one wishes that Rossetti had followed up this generous gift of *Dante and His Circle* with a *Divine Comedy*, that should forever naturalize the mature genius of the great Dante in England's and America's Helicon! That this is no mere pious wish founded on devout ignorance of rival claims, let a comparison attest in the crucial passage (lines 112 to 142) of Canto V in the *Inferno*. It is the well-known narrative concerning Paolo and Francesco's love and death and doom. And here to save space let us fix our attention exclusively on the four most remarkable and famous morsels from the great passage:

(1)

*O lasso !*

*Quanti dolci pensier, quanto desio  
 Menò costoro al doloroso passio !*

Alas, how many sweet thoughts, how great desire, led these unto  
 the woeful pass. (Norton's prose.)

Ah me ! what sweet thoughts, what longing led them to the woeful  
 pass ! (Gallancz, prose by terzets.)

Alas ! by what sweet thoughts, what fond desire  
 Must they at length to that ill pass have reached !  
 (Carey, blank verse.)

Alas !  
 How many pleasant thoughts, how much desire  
 Conducted them unto the dolorous pass !  
 (Longfellow, blank verse.)

Alas !  
 All their sweet thoughts then, all the steps that led  
 To love, but brought them to this dolorous pass.  
 (Leigh Hunt, terza rima)

Ah, Woe !  
 What sweet fond thoughts, what passionate desire  
 Led to the pass whence such great sorrows flow !  
 (Plumptre, terza rima)

Alas !  
 How many sweet thoughts and how much desire  
 Led those two onward to the dolorous pass ! (Rossetti)

(2) Ma dimmi, al tempo de' dolci sospiri  
 A che e come concedette amore  
 Che conoscesti i dubbiosi desiri.

But tell me at the time of the sweet sighs by what and how did love con-  
 cede to you to *know the dubious desires* ? (Norton)

But tell me : in the time of the sweet sighs by what and how love granted  
 you to *know the dubious desires* ? (Gollancz)

But tell me in the time of your sweet sighs,  
 By what, and how love granted that *ye knew*  
*Your yet uncertain wishes* ? (Carey)

But tell me at the time of those sweet sighs  
 By what and in what manner love conceded,  
 That *you should know your dubious desires*. (Longfellow)

But tell me, at the time when sighs were sweet,  
 What made thee strive no longer ; — hurried thee  
 To the last step where bliss and sorrow meet ? (Hunt)

But tell me in the time of those sweet sighs,  
The hour, the mode in which love led you on  
*Doubtful desires to know with open eyes.* (Plumptre)

But tell me in the season of sweet sighs,  
When and what way did love instruct you so  
That *he in your vague longings made you wise?* (Rossetti)

- (3) Nessun maggior dolore  
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice  
Nella miseria; e ciò sa il tuo dottore.

There is no greater woe than in misery to remember the happy time,  
and that thy teacher knows. (Norton)

There is no greater pain than to recall a happy time in wretchedness: and  
this thy teacher knows. (Gollancz)

No greater grief than to remember days  
Of joy, when misery is at hand. That kens  
Thy learn'd instructor. (Carey)

There is no greater sorrow  
Than to be mindful of the happy time  
In misery, and that thy teacher knows. (Longfellow)

There is no greater sorrow (answered she)  
And this thy teacher here knoweth full well,  
Than calling to mind joy in misery. (Hunt)

A greater grief is none  
Than to remember happier seasons past  
In anguish; this thy teacher well hath known. (Plumptre)

There is no greater woe  
Than the remembrance brings of happy days  
In misery; and this thy guide doth know. (Rossetti)

- (4) Quando legemmo il *disiato* riso  
Esser baciato *da cotanto* amante,  
Questi, che mai da me non *fia diviso*,  
La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.

When we read of the *longed-for* smile being kissed by *such* a lover, this  
one, who never from me *shall be divided*, kissed my mouth all trembling.  
(Norton)

When we read how the *fond* smile was kissed by *such* a lover, he who  
*shall* never be *divided* from me, kissed my mouth all trembling.  
(Gollancz)

When of that smile we read,  
The *wished* smile so rapturously kissed

By one *so deep* in love, then he, who ne'er  
 From me *shall separate*, at once my lips  
 All trembling kissed. (Carey)

When as we read of the much longed-for smile  
 Being by *such a noble* lover kissed,  
 This one, who ne'er from me *shall be divided*,  
 Kissed me upon the mouth all palpitating. (Longfellow)

'Twas where the lover, *mothlike in his flame*  
 Drawn by her *sweet* smile, kissed it. O then he  
 Whose lot and mine *are now for aye the same*,  
 All in a tremble on the mouth kissed me. (Hunt)

When as we read how smile *long sought for* flushed  
 Fair face at kiss of lover *so renowned*,  
 He kissed me on my lips, as impulse rushed,  
 All trembling; now with *me for aye is bound*. (Plumtre)

For when we read of that *great* lover, how  
 He kissed the smile which he had *longed to win*,  
 Then he whom *naught can sever* from me now  
 Forever, kissed my mouth all quivering. (Rossetti)

How does not the closeness of the prose suggest at times the strait-jacket? How does not Hunt, the irresponsible, paraphrase altogether at times too recklessly? How does not the stalwart Plumtre fail utterly in the fourth? And how always adequate and frequently brilliant is not Rossetti?

But it may be contended that Rossetti was so peculiarly consecrated to the service of Dante, as to make such a comparison unfair. Let us turn then to his version from Villon, and note the coincidence here also, and in greater degree of translator and paraphrast; the latter always only appearing for desperate rescue of the former, or for the divine miracle that transfigures, through revisualization of the first poet's inspiring vision, the mere translation into a new original poem by the original poet in the translator's language. So we glance first at *The Ballade of Dead Ladies*, where we have three other good translations conveniently to hand for comparison: Miss Castello's, Mr. John Payne's and Mr. Andrew Lang's.<sup>8</sup> First let us con-

<sup>8</sup> L. S. Castello's specimens of the Early Poetry of France; London, 1885, freely quoted in Longfellow's "Poets and Poetry of Europe."

"Ballades and Verses Vain." Andrew Lang, Scribner 1884.

"The Poems of Master François Villon," John Payne. Thomas Mosher, 1900.

sider the refrain, that most critical of all lines in a ballade :

*Mais où sont les neiges d'antan !*

Where is fled the South wind's snow? (Castello)

But what is become of last year's snow? (Payne)

But where is the last year's snow? (Lang)

But where are the snows of yesteryear? (Rossetti).

What a felicity is not this last! Next, let us view the opening lines, only less critical for the beauty of the ballade:

Dictes-moi où, n'en quel pays  
Est Flora, la belle Romaine.

Tell me to what region flown  
Is Flora, the fair Roman gone. (Castello)

Tell me where, in what land of shade,  
Bides fair Flora of Rome, and where . . . (Payne)

Nay, tell me now in what strange air  
The Roman Flora dwells to-day. (Lang)

Tell me now in what hidden way is  
Lady Flora, the lovely Roman? (Rossetti).

Often has this opening been deservedly praised. But let the student persevere in the comparison, and it is a temptation too strong for us to bring out, here and now, the difficult lines concerning the "beatified maid:"

Et Jehanne, la bonne Lorraine,  
Qu'Anglois brulèrent à Rouen;  
Où sont ils, Vierge Souveraine? . .

Where is Joan, whom English flame  
Gave, at Rouen, death and fame?  
Where are all? Does any know? (Castello)

And Joan the Maid,  
The good Lorrainer, the English bare  
Captive to Rouen and burned her there;

Where are they, Virgin debonair? (Payne)

Good Joan, whom English did betray  
In Rouen town and burned her? No,  
Maiden and Queen, no man may say: (Lang)

And that good Joan whom Englishmen  
 At Rouen doomed and burned her there,—  
 Mother of God, where are they then? . . . (Rossetti)

Once again it may be objected that this particular piece of translation is an original inspiration of Rossetti's. Very well, and so be it. The point of the present writer is exactly that Rossetti had just such inspirations in an almost continuous series. The ballade made by Villon at his mother's request troubles Rossetti no little by such ultra orthodox terms as 'sin' and 'sinner,' which he periphrastically avoids, as suggestive in English of a nasal tone. There is a difficulty too in the poem's stress on trans-substantiation, and the Virgin birth, which to an English ear seems strange, and perchance (*mirabile dictu*) indelicate. Hence a reconception of the last four lines in the second stanza; which is, we can not but think, more effective, than a direct translation must always turn out to be in this particular case:

Preservez moy, que point je ne face ce;  
 Vierge portant, sans rompure encourir,  
 Le sacrement qu'on célèbre à la messe.  
 En ceste foi je vueil vivre et mourir.

Assoilzie me, that I may have no teen,  
 Maid, that without breach of Virginitie  
 Didst bear our Lord that in the Host is seen.  
 In this belief I will to live and die. (Payne)

Oh, help me lest in vain for me should pass  
 (Sweet Virgin that shalt have no loss thereby!)  
 The blessed Host, and sacring of the Mass.  
 Even in this faith I choose to live and die. (Rossetti)<sup>9</sup>

Let, however, in all candor, the comparison of the entire ballade be instituted, and there can remain little doubt of Mr. Rossetti's superiority, although Mr. Payne knows his old French better, and strives honestly enough for archaic atmosphere in English, and fails not to achieve, on the whole a level of craftsmanship surpassed only perhaps by two or three English translators of very modern times.

But what we have been at such great pains to exhibit, namely Dante Gabriel Rossetti's great eminence as a translator, has for us at present only this primary importance: that he, our

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<sup>9</sup> In translating Villon, Swinburne alone seems to be Rossetti's peer.

greatest translator, is paraphrast not for convenience sake, but from linguistic and æsthetic necessity, a goodly part of the time; and that paraphrase, if poetically legitimate, does not constitute a mere detached periphrasis of an untranslatable phrase, but is the result of fresh visualization of the original poet's vision, so that the altered expression is as legitimate a product of the first vital idea of the poem, as that for which it becomes an inevitable substitute.

#### V. A CURIOUS INSTANCE.

Now for the proof of this proposition we have a most interesting illustration, which, will for readers steeped in mere textual criticism long wonted to the quite mechanical hanging of masterpieces on mere circumstantial evidence, border on the incredible and the occult! Antoine-Vincent Arnault<sup>10</sup> wrote after the Battle of Waterloo, a little elegy in parable form to the Princess Hortense, in which Napoleon is the oak, storm-stricken; Arnault the wind-driven leaf, and, at the end, the laurel leaf; Hortense the petal of the rose. Leopardi liked the little poem, but either was not aware of the original allusions, or ignored them wilfully. Be that as it may, he omitted, in translating, the three passages italicized in the French and introduced the words and phrases italicized in the Italian, entitling his derivative poem *Imitazione*.

#### LA FEUILLE.

De ta tige détachée,  
Pauvre feuille *desséchée*,  
Ou vas-tu? *Je n'en sais rien*.  
*L'orage a brisé le chêne*  
Qui seul était mon soutien.  
De son inconstante *haleine*,  
*Le zéphyr ou l'aiglon*  
*Depuis ce jour me promène*  
De la forêt à la plaine,  
De la montagne au vallon.  
Je vais où le vent me mène,  
*Sans me plaindre ou m'effrayer*:  
Je vais où va toute chose  
Ou va la feuille de rose  
Et la feuille de laurier.

(Arnault. '15)

#### IMITAZIONE

Lungi dal proprio ramo,  
Povera foglia *frale*,  
Dove vai tu? Dal *faggio*  
*La dov'io nacqui*, mi divide il vento.  
Esso, *tornando*, a volo  
Dal bosco alla campagna,  
Dalla valle mi *porta* alla montagna.  
*Vo pellagrina*, e tutto l'altro *ignoro*.  
Vo dove ogni altra cosa,  
Dove *naturalmente*  
Va la foglia di rosa,  
E la foglia d'alloro. (Leopardi. '31-'35)

<sup>10</sup> 1766-1834.



Now it is most noteworthy that "frale" (fragile) for "desséchée" (withered), "pellegrina" (a pilgrim, wanderer) and "porta" (carries) for "me promène" (drives me), increase the universal pathetic applicability with a deepened sense of frailty and fatality. The loss of the storm, on the contrary, that breaks the oak,<sup>11</sup> the substitution of the brief "tornando" (turning) for "inconstante haleine, le zephyr on l'aquilon," (intermittent breath, the zephyr or the winter wind) makes the objective reality less vivid and dramatic. The most important change however is the substitution of "tutto l'altro ignoro" (all else I know not), intimating an agnostic despair, instead of "Je n'en sais rien," at the beginning of the leaf's reply, which merely denied knowledge of its destined direction. "Sans me plaindre on m'effrayer" insinuated a militant, stoic, feeling, which is out of keeping with Leopardi's sentimental doctrine of humanitarianism, based on pessimism: and "Seco perpetuamente" (forever with the wind) and "naturalmente" (by course of nature's law) added to the whither of all things, makes the pessimism absolute and philosophically necessary.

Rightly, to be sure, did Leopardi omit any reference to Arnault's poem in the title of his piece. Too great and true a poet was he to suppose his "Imitazione" any fair equivalent of *La Feuille*.

Now it so happened that Dante Gabriel Rossetti read and was drawn to Leopardi's poem. It set him to musing, and finally to versifying, with the result of "The Leaf;" which we print with all departures from the Italian italicized:

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<sup>11</sup> In Leopardi, *chêne* becomes *faggio* (beech) instead of *quercia*, probably because of difference in sentiment (pathos instead of stoic valor); and the English love of the oak restored the original tree chosen as Jove's, and therefore Napoleon's.

THE LEAF

Torn from your parent bough,  
 Poor leaf all *withered* now,  
     Where go you? "*I cannot tell.*  
*Storm stricken is the oak-tree*  
 Where I grew, whence I fell.  
 Changeful continually,  
     *The zephyr and hurricane*  
 Since that day bid me *flee*  
 From deepest woods to the lea,  
     From highest hills to the plain.  
 Where the wind carries me  
     *I go without fear or grief:*  
 I go whither each one goes;  
 Thither the leaf of the rose,  
     And thither the laurel-leaf." ('69-'73)

IMITAZIONE

Lungi dal proprio ramo,  
 Povera foglia frale,  
 Dove vai tu? Dal faggio  
 La dov'io nacqui, mi divise il vento.  
 Esso, tornando, a volo  
 Dal bosco alla campagna,  
 Dalla valle mi porta alla montagna.  
 Vo pella-grina, e tutto l'altro ignoro.  
 Vo dove ogni altra cosa,  
 Dove naturalmente  
 Va la foglia de rosa,  
 E la foglia d'alloro. (Leopardi.)

Note that "Dov' io nacqui" (where I was born) is represented above by "parent," inapplicable of course to Napoleon. "Perpetuamente" (perpetually) is properly transferred from the flight, to the changefulness of the wind, as "continually." The feeling of "pellegrina" (pilgrim) is excluded. The agnosticism of "tutto l'altro ignoro" disappears; and also the scientific fatalism of "naturalmente." On the other hand, the circumstances of the storm re-appears, and along with it the stoic refusal to complain or cherish fear.

THE LEAF

Torn from your parent bough,  
 Poor leaf all withered now,  
     Where go you? "*I cannot tell.*  
*Storm stricken is the oak-tree*  
 Where I grew, whence I fell.  
 Changeful continually,  
     *The zephyr and hurricane*  
 Since that day bid me *flee*  
 From deepest woods to the lea,  
     From highest hills to the plain.  
 Where the wind carries me  
     *I go without fear or grief:*  
 I go whither each one goes;  
 Thither the leaf of the rose,  
     And thither the laurel-leaf."

LA FEUILLE

Da ta tige detachée,  
 Pauvre feuille *desséchée*,  
 Ou vas-tu? *Je n'en sais rien.*  
*L'orage a brisé le chêne*  
 Qui seul seul était mon *soutien*.  
 De con inconstante *haleine*  
*Le zephyr ou l'aquilon*  
*Depuis ce jour me promène*  
 Da la forêt à la plaine  
 De la montagne au vallon.  
 Je vais où le vent me mène,  
*Sans me plaindre on m'effrayer :*  
 Je vais où va toute chose  
 Où va la feuille de rose  
 Et la feuille de laurier.

Coroborative evidence for our interesting contention may be had by comparing German translations respectively of *La*

*Feuille* and of *Imitazione*. But the English reader may be grateful to us if we subjoin for his convenience a translation, somewhat loose, of Leopardi's poem by Frederick Townsend, for comparison with Rossetti's resuscitation of the original.

#### IMITATION <sup>12</sup>

Wandering from the parent bough,  
 Little, trembling leaf,  
 Whither goest thou?  
 "From the beech where I was born,  
 By the north wind was I torn.  
 Him I follow in his flight,  
 Over mountain, over vale,  
 From the forest to the plain,  
 Up the hill, and down again,  
 With him ever on the way.  
 More than that I cannot say.  
 Where I go must all things go,  
 Gentle, simple, high and low,  
 Leaves of laurel, leaves of rose;  
 Whither, Heaven only knows!" ('87)

Now we hesitated to utilize this extraordinary instance of a peep into the translator's workshop, merely on the evidence of editions, or the explicit note even of the editor of the authorized edition. In reply to an inquiry, a valuable communication was obtained from Mr. William Michael Rossetti, which we print in an appendix. He substantiated what had been gathered from the authorized edition, but seemed somewhat alarmed at the reference in the letter of inquiry to his brother's gift of visualization.

These are days of strange doctrine. No wonder Mr. Rossetti waxed suspicious, reading the cabbalistic words "gift of visualization!" True, both he and his brother honored William Blake, but that was ere Blavatzkiism, Babism, Eddyism and popular misapplications of Psychic Research had made the atmosphere unpleasant for merely literary and disinterested mystics.

Well, if the letter which we reprint in full bears conclusive

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<sup>12</sup> *Poems of Giacomo Leopardi*. Translated by Frederick Townsend. Putnam's, 1887. Thirty-eight Poems.

testimony, there is but one theory before us; namely, that Rossetti did with Leopardi's poem just what Leopardi had done with Arnault's; this difference only obtaining, that Leopardi philosophized rather than visualized, and Rossetti visualized rather than philosophized. Consequently, in every case of change from Leopardi's poem, Rossetti returned unconsciously to Arnault's apologue; not certainly because of any supernatural persistence of the original poem, mystically suggesting itself ghostwise to the third poet; but simply because the elements Rossetti omitted were philosophic and undramatic, and those he introduced into his supposed original were dramatic and sensuously imaginative and natural to the primary conception.

Now Rossetti did not totally restore the original poem. Slight vestige remain of Leopardi in "parent," "carries me," "changeful." "Each one goes" is an infelicity, due to the difficulty of poetically rendering "*ogni altra cosa*" (everything besides) which rationally particularized a little in Leopardi on the "*toute chose*" (everything) of the original.

Clearly Rossetti did not know the story of Arnault's poem at the time he made his translation, whatever may have been the case at some later date. For certainly he could not have credited Leopardi with furnishing him the original, had he known Arnault's poem; and much less, had he known it, could he have thought it a translation of the Italian, when he found himself persistently preferring the supposed translation to the supposed original, in every departure from the same. Turn the matter over and over again, however the reader sceptical in matters æsthetic may do, the stubborn fact remains that Rossetti *restored almost absolutely from a translation an original poem which he did not know existed*, merely because, when translating, Rossetti rendered conception by conception, not phrase by phrase; nay in fact, before he rendered any conception whatever, reconceived and recomposed and livingly reconstructed the whole in his mind, and then alone addressed himself to translating conception by conception with such liberties as the visualized whole seemed to warrant or suggest. And this we

would maintain is but a most striking exemplification of the process of true translation.<sup>13</sup>

#### VI. THE MAIN CONTENTION

If the point we have endeavored to establish, for which we make no claims to original discovery, be accepted in good faith; then it will indeed be difficult to refuse acceptance of the further contention of this paper, namely: that *translation offers a pedagogical method for the teaching of literature as an art.*

It is indeed pleasant to reflect that in urging the formation of graduate schools for teaching the Art of Translation at our universities, we should be carrying out the suggestions of that first great American teacher of Literature, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who in his *Poets and Poetry of Europe* pointed us the way to a cosmopolitan culture; and what is more, set us the brave example, seeking not originality and priority of devising, like a Poe, or a Whitman; ambitious merely of a sane large-hearted re-creation of things positively known to be beautiful; and the production, then of such things, as should bear lovely likeness to them, out of materials that offer themselves to the cultured artist on our continent, and at home in our special civilization and nation.<sup>14</sup>

Yes, the poetry of Longfellow may suffer from the limitations of his individual genius, from his involvement in an ephemeral phase of the Romantic movement, from his appearance too early in our cultivation of æsthetic self-confidence; but the gracious catholicity of his spirit, his modest avocation to the translator's self-denying but most cultivating and satisfying

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<sup>13</sup> The second letter of Mr. Rossetti, in response to further more explicit inquiry, does much to support the views here expressed, and those implied as their background, although it takes issue with us, mistakenly we cannot but think, in the matter of the detail analysis of Rossetti's *Leaf*. Mr. Rossetti, however, had only a letter and not this present detailed statement before him of the three poems and their relations.

<sup>14</sup> We would not be supposed wholly unappreciative of Poe's verse technique, much less of Whitman's very important, though not clearly understood, discoveries in poetic composition. The intention is only to vindicate Longfellow from the silly charges of plagiarism, and the unfortunate but natural reaction from an enthusiastic overpraise which made a sane German critic denominate him the American Goethe!

art — these at all events, whatsoever may befall his poetic fame, are to be our inheritance forever as a people, and a compelling power unto a new birth of our American Literature.

For not to no purpose must we believe are we thus, by origin, of many nations and languages; and if America shall become in truth the cultural fulfillment of Europe's prophetic hope, she will not be a New England but a New Europe. Then the preachers and promoters of her larger National life, unto the appearance of her original seers and world-poets, will be the Translators, who make live for us, together in a social whole, the several great and noble spirits of every people, physically or spiritually ancestral to our own that is to be! Shakespeare and Milton shall have to welcome on equal terms, in this their new Empire, Dante, Molière, Goethe and a score more of their peers, "bards of passion and of mirth." And unto this consummation let the present paper be only, for aught we care — if our disallower would so phrase it—the raucous crow of a cockerel on a rail fence, in the sublime face of the vast "Rose of Dawn!"

WILLIAM NORMAN GUTHRIE.

The University of the South.

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DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI AS TRANSLATOR: TWO LETTERS

The writer of the foregoing article on Translation ventured to address Mr. Rossetti for definite and irrefutable testimony on certain points in his proposed treatment of Dante Gabriel Rossetti as a Translator. The result was two helpful letters, which being free to use as he pleased,\* he first quoted from in his text and footnotes; but upon second thought considered it fairer and more courteous to print entire, italicizing the particular parts that bear on his paper, and let the reader judge for himself, and share the writer's gratitude for Mr. Rossetti's courtesy.

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\* I have had the pleasure of receiving your letter of May 25, and I have written down, as within, a few observations bearing upon what you say. They are at your service, for any use to which you may care to put them.

Yours very faithfully,

W. M. ROSSETTI.